

Child and Family Services Reviews

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Minnesota

August 2001

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families**

Region V

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part A. Performance Outcomes of Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being

	Page
I. Safety	3
II. Permanency	9
III. Well-Being	21

Part B. Key Findings for Seven Systemic Factors

IV. Statewide Information System	29
V. Case Review System	31
VI. Quality Assurance System	37
VII. Training	39
VIII. Service Array	43
IX. Agency Responsiveness to the Community	46
X. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing Recruitment, and Retention	50

Part A. Performance Outcomes of Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being

I. SAFETY

Status of Safety Outcome S1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 87.23% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Safety Outcome S1.

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	19	10	12	41	87.23
Partially Achieved:	3	2	1	6	12.77
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	0
Not Applicable:	1	0	1	2	NA
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	6.1%	5.9%	X		
Maltreatment of children in foster care	0.57%	0.41%	X		

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

16 (76.19%) Strength
5 (23.81%) Area Needing Improvement
29 Not Applicable

Basis:

Statewide Self-Assessment (SWA):

- Minnesota's Child Welfare System has received authorization for counties to establish programs for alternative responses to child maltreatment reports. Subsequently, the Minnesota Department of

Human Services (MDHS) secured a grant to help fund a four-year pilot program in nine counties.

- Through Minnesota's Alternative Response program, county social services agencies replace the traditional investigative approach to some maltreatment reports with family assessments and services. Families avoid the confrontational or intrusive investigative process when child abuse or neglect is suspected. MDHS is providing training and guidelines to county staff in 20 counties.
- Structured Decision Making (SDM) is being piloted in 14 counties. SDM is an actuarially based approach to the primary decision points in child protection. SDM uses a series of tools to determine response priority, child safety, risk of maltreatment, and family strengths and needs.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- One county uses Microsoft Access to track as an outcome the percentage of Child Abuse and Neglect (CA&N) investigations that are begun and completed within the Minnesota timeframes. (source: stakeholders)
- **NOTE:** When there is a reference to a county, it means one of the counties reviewed.
- In most instances, face-to-face contacts on investigations were done within the established time frames. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- In some instances when abuse and neglect reports were given low priority, several days elapsed between when the supervisor assigned the case and when the investigator made the initial contact. (source: case reviews)
- Many reports were screened out or not investigated and there was no documentation regarding the reason. (source: case reviews)
- Indian Tribal Organization (ITO) staff were not always notified until after American Indian children were taken into custody. (source: stakeholders)
- One of the counties did not accept maltreatment reports for children over age 15. (source: stakeholders)

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

45 (95.74%) Strength

2 (4.26%) Area Needing Improvement

2 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- The Minnesota policy that requires a new assessment after new CA&N allegations has been applied inconsistently by counties. Some minor reports are not treated as new events, but as extensions of original cases. If a child has a report in one county, a subsequent report in a different county will not be counted as a recurrence. Minnesota's policy on how to handle subsequent maltreatment in ongoing cases should be reaffirmed or revised.
- Initiatives that may reduce the incidence of maltreatment in foster care include: development of a single home study for adoption, foster care, and relatives; creation of foster parent support groups; use of foster parents to mentor adoptive parents; and revision of licensing rules to assure safety of placements.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Minnesota met the National Standard for Repeat Maltreatment.
- During the review period, 45 of the 47 (95.74%) cases reviewed were rated as a strength. (source: case reviews)
- The use of Alternative Response in providing services to families at-risk of child abuse or neglect provides deflection from the traditional model of investigation. Cases involving Alternative Response were not counted as having repeat maltreatment for the purpose of this review because there were no formal investigations of the reports, nor were there dispositions made as to whether the reports were substantiated. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- During the review period, there were no instances of maltreatment of the foster care children whose cases were reviewed. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- Many cases had extensive histories of repeat maltreatment prior to the review period. (source: case reviews)
- Due to the lack of an automated interface, there was limited sharing of information on any prior history of child abuse and neglect across counties. If a county becomes aware that the family lived in another county, there may be contact with the other county to determine if there was a prior history of child abuse and neglect, but this is not a formal process. (source: stakeholders)
- Documentation was inconsistent regarding why some telephone calls made to one county reporting maltreatment did not result in an investigation. (source: case reviews)
- Concern was expressed that reservation police would not always remove children whom the social work staff considered to be at-risk. (source: stakeholders)

Status of Safety Outcome S2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 88.37% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Safety Outcome S1.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	16	11	11	38	88.37
Partially Achieved:	1	0	0	1	2.33
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	1	1	6	13.95
Not Applicable:	2	0	2	4	NA

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

23 (79.31%) Strength

6 (20.69%) Area Needing Improvement

20 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- A comparison of the number of children who entered foster care with the number who received services after a determination of maltreatment showed that approximately 25% of the children who needed services were placed in foster care. Therefore, about 75% received services in their home or community without the need for placement.
- The MDHS provides training and guidelines to county staff in 20 counties. Initial results of the Alternative Response program mentioned in item one show promising trends in promoting the ability of children at-risk to remain safely with families.
- African American families who suffer from physical abuse and neglect are less likely to be referred for counseling and educational services and more likely to be placed out of home. These examples of disproportionate representation and differential treatment raise questions of racial bias, which is a major concern for the State and local social service agencies.

- MDHS surveyed Minnesota's counties to identify the services they used most often to achieve certain child welfare goals, such as the prevention of out-of-home placement.
- Services offered included family based services, home health care, early childhood intervention, day care, respite, chemical dependency treatment, funds to pay utilities, in-home counseling services.
- ITOs had American Indian social workers available to go on visits with caseworkers to assist in providing culturally sensitive services.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Alternative response is a strength-based and community oriented approach to addressing child maltreatment reports that do not meet statutory requirements for a mandated investigated approach. Reports that do not meet the endangerment standard may be addressed with family assessment and services. Stakeholders and county personnel praised this approach in dealing with families. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Some cases had intensive services such as anger management, in-home visits by public health nurses, Project Child-Project Rebound, Aftercare for Mothers, prevention programs, integrated services, and child care. (source: case reviews)
- Many community services were available. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- In some cases, there was a lack of assessment of risk and identification of needs. (source: case reviews)
- In some cases, services were provided to the family but risk was not targeted. (source: case reviews)
- There were indications that the use of a triage approach for addressing child abuse and neglect has led to some lower risk cases escalating to more serious incidents that required removal from the home when in-home services were not provided. (source: stakeholders)

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

38 (84.44%) Strength

7 (15.56%) Area Needing Improvement

4 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- The Minnesota Child Mortality Review Panel looked at four cases involving deaths of children in 1999. The Panel found that in some cases, the child protection agency was aware of a pattern of abuse to young children and the parents were somewhat compliant or noncompliant with child protection intervention services. Despite the pattern of injuries and lack of compliance, children were left in the care of abusive parents. In all four cases, children died as a result of abusive injuries inflicted by a parent. The county failed to note that although family preservation is sometimes an appropriate intervention strategy, these cases had behavioral indicators of high risk and these were ignored. Cost containment factors also seemed to be a reason why some social workers maintain children in dangerous home environments.
- From 1991 through 1998, determinations of sexual abuse dropped by 39%, a decline that continued into 1999. Further study is needed to determine the causes of this decline.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- The service array in all counties included home based community services. (source: stakeholders)
- Services were generally culturally appropriate. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Staff made efforts to reduce harm and prevent removal. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- Some children were returned home with only time-limited monitoring and follow-up. (source: stakeholders)
- In at least one instance, a case involving a child who needed therapy was closed without therapy for the child and without notification to the mental health agency. (source: case reviews)

II. PERMANENCY

Status of Permanency Outcome P1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 62.50% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Permanency Outcome P1. In addition, 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(i) requires the State to meet the national standards for each statewide data indicator associated with the outcome. Foster care re-entries were 22.7% while the national standard was 8.6%; the length of time to achieve adoption was 27.5% in 1999 while the national standard was 32.0%; and the stability of foster care placements was 82.3% in 1999 while the national standard was 86.7%.

A data discrepancy occurred in the performance indicator, Foster Care Re-entries. The National Standard is 8.6 per cent (that is, that no more than 8.6 per cent of children who entered foster care re-entered foster care within twelve months of the prior episode). Minnesota's percentage for this indicator was 22.7 per cent. Of the 24 cases reviewed onsite, however, there were no re-entries into foster care. In order to resolve this discrepancy, the State would have had to submit current data to show that the rate for re-entries now meets the national standard of 8.6. ACF Regional Office informed the State of this. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (MDHS) informed ACF that current data indicate that Minnesota does not meet the Foster Care Re-entries national standard.

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	2	4	15	62.50
Partially Achieved:	1	4	2	7	29.17
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	0	0	2	8.33
Not Applicable:	11	6	8	25	NA
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries	8.6%	22.7%		X	
Length of time to achieve reunification	76.2%	80.3%	X		
Length of time to achieve adoption	32.0%	1999, 27.5%		X	
Stability of foster care placements	89%	1999, 82.3%		X	
Length of stay in foster care (This is not used to determine substantial conformity)	N/A	1999, 12.45 months; 1999, 2.43 months for 1st time entry cohort	N/A	N/A	

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

24 (100.0%) Strength

0 (0%) Area Needing Improvement

25 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota's percentage of re-entries may be distorted by counting short-term emergency placements, counting delinquent youth who are placed in short-term consequence programs-sometimes more than once, and recording children in respite care as placements.
- Counties are cautious about returning a child home from placement unless they are confident that the child will be safe.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There were no re-entries in the review period. (source: case reviews)
- One county addressed the possibility of children coming into care inappropriately by co-locating screening staff at police stations in high placement districts and at the county's emergency placement shelter. (source: stakeholders)
- There were examples of stable LTFC relative placements. (source: case reviews)
- There were efforts to place and to keep American Indian children in Indian homes. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Minnesota did not meet the National Standard for Foster Care Re-entries. After discussions with the State regarding the discrepancy between the onsite case reviews and the statewide aggregate data, the State informed ACF that current data indicate Minnesota still does not meet the national standard.
- In one county, half of the foster care cases had a history of multiple foster care re-entries prior to the period under review. (source: case reviews)

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

18 (75.0%) Strength

6 (25.0%) Area Needing Improvement

25 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- In 1999, 13% of children experienced six or more placement settings in their current placement episode, about 23% experienced three to five placements. The 1998 numbers were about the same. Data indicates children just entering care experienced more stability in their placements. 2.5% experienced six or more placements. 16% experienced three to five placement settings. These numbers are still a cause for concern.
- The high use of emergency shelters may also account for a high number of placement settings per placement episode.
- Counties are reluctant to place children with relatives until relatives are licensed fully.
- Minnesota expects the Concurrent Permanency Planning initiative to decrease the number of placements children experience.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There were many supportive services being provided at the treatment foster care level. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- Minnesota did not meet the national standard for stability of foster care placements.
- The common practice of limiting respite care for foster parents to 14 days resulted, in one instance, in an unnecessary placement change for a child. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- The usual practice of initially sending children to emergency shelters and temporary homes has a negative impact on stability. (source: stakeholders)
- In some cases, the evaluation of the prospective relative placement is insufficient to determine the relative's ability to care for the child. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, services that could have maintained a child in the initial placement such as chemical dependency assessment for children, discretionary funds for families, respite care, more available day care and more frequent contact from social services were not available or not offered to foster parents or relative caregivers. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

16 (69.57%) Strength

7 (30.43%) Area Needing Improvement

26 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota's figures are fairly consistent with the national average for most of the types of permanency goals. With respect to children for whom reunification was a goal, Minnesota's percentage in 1998 (47.4 %) was somewhat higher than the national average (42%). In contrast, the percentage of children for whom adoption was a goal (16.8%) was somewhat lower than the national average (19%). The most significant difference is the much higher percentage of children in Minnesota who had the goal of LTFC (18.9%) as compared to the national average of 7%.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Due in part to the tightened permanency timeframes for children under age eight, there were examples of successful reunifications in short periods of time. (source: case reviews)
- In some counties, kinship recruitment workers search for relatives when a child is placed in foster care. These workers contact all identified relatives (both the maternal and paternal sides of a child's family), assess their ability to care for the child, check their background, and provide information to the child's social worker. Foster parents are assessed for their interest and ability to adopt, if it is in the child's best interest. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- The lower payments available for the Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program and for adoption assistance were viewed by many as a significant factor that reduces the number of permanencies that are achieved. (e.g., American Indian children frequently remain in foster care longer because relatives who would accept custody cannot afford to do so without supplemental funds). (source: stakeholders)
- Appropriate concurrent planning occurred in some instances. Often other permanency options were considered only after the original plan was abandoned. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Concurrent planning was not addressed early and tended to focus on younger children. More planning is needed for older children. (source: case reviews)
- Although allowed for by State statute, there was a lack of flexibility in granting exceptions to the six-month permanency timeframe for children under the age of eight. (source: stakeholders)

Item 8. Independent living services

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

6 (85.71%) Strength

1 (14.29%) Area Needing Improvement

42 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- MDHS Adolescent Services staff has developed a three-pronged strategy to provide services to Minnesota adolescents. 1) Continue to provide an allocation to county social service agencies to assist youth that have experienced at least one day of out-of-home care after their 14th birthday. Pursuant to Chafee legislation, this includes an allocation to tribal agencies. 2) Combine funding from increased Federal IV-E funding (Chafee), State homeless youth funds, and new Temporary Assistance to Needy

Families (TANF) funds (teen pregnancy prevention, family reunification services to minor parents and prostitution prevention) and dedicate a portion to restructuring the 11 existing grants that serve adolescents. 3) Use the unspent money from the above-referenced funding to increase the State's capacity to serve targeted populations of youth.

- MDHS is proposing legislation that will require county social service agencies to develop an individualized case plan specifically focused on preparing youth age 16 or older who are state wards or in LTFC for independent living and self-sufficiency.
- Two statewide training events for youth workers have been held and one is planned for 2001.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Independent living skill needs were written into Individual Education Plans and schools were involved in providing services. (source: case reviews)
- Workers were aware when Independent Living plans were necessary and the plans were put into place. (source: case reviews)
- Youth who have been in the custody of the State can receive a free college education.(source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Independent Living plans were not completed on youth age 16 and older in all instances. (source: case reviews)

Item 9. Adoption

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

3 (75.0%) Strength

1 (25.0%) Area Needing Improvement

45 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota's Public/Private Adoption Initiative (PPAI) brings together private and public agencies to find adoptive parents for waiting children. Public agencies can enlist the help of private agencies to recruit families for children with special needs. Since it began in 1998, the program has served 770 children. In one period, a total of 439 children were placed in pre-adoptive homes and 214 children experienced finalized adoption. Efforts to improve Minnesota's adoption rates through programs such as PPAI resulted, from 1995 through 2000, in an increase in adoptions of 248% for children under State guardianship.
- Approximately 4,000 children with special needs and under state guardianship were adopted with the help of adoption assistance, a program

to help families with the extra expenses associated with a special needs child.

- A total of 874 children with special needs were placed with relatives through a transfer of custody and with assistance from the State's RCA program.
- The pool of potential foster and adoptive families was increased.
- Families who adopted children were linked with experienced "parent liaisons."

Onsite Review:

Strength

- In recent years there have been significant increases in the number of children adopted. (source: stakeholders)
- Open adoptions were encouraged and supported. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- The State and counties were respectful of tribal traditions of not terminating parental rights. In one county, the agency was making efforts to finalize the permanency plan by placing American Indian children with American Indian foster families or relatives who might adopt the children. The plans for the children showed efforts to move children toward adoption while maintaining awareness of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, an adoption specialist worked with other staff on adoption issues. (source: stakeholders)
- The One Church/One Child model was used to find adoptive homes for African-American children. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Minnesota did not meet the National Standard for Length of Time to Achieve Adoption.
- The differential rate between foster care and adoption assistance has the effect of discouraging adoptions. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, most staff did not consider alternative permanency plans until it had been determined that reunification was not possible. (source: case reviews)
- In another county, tribal social workers were told by the agency that funds for adoption assistance had been exhausted so adoptions were delayed until funds became available. (source: stakeholders)

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

10 (66.67%) Strength

5 (33.33%) Area Needing Improvement

34 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- LTFC is viewed as a less favorable permanency option because of its lack of permanence. Financial compensation for foster care is higher than for either relative custody or adoption. This may be a factor in some foster parents or relatives deciding not to adopt.
- LTFC is frequently used as a goal for American Indian children. Tribes tend to disfavor the use of termination of parental rights as a goal and this has been a barrier to adoptions. One result is that many American Indian children are placed in LTFC. Tribes are currently working to return to a more traditional adoption system that does not require a termination of parental rights. This may help to reduce the use of LTFC for American Indian children in the future.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- In some instances, permanency goals were based on the best interests of the child. (source: case reviews)
- There was court involvement in permanency planning and LTFC placements were court-sanctioned. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- Once the case goal was changed to LTFC, other permanency options were not regularly re-evaluated. (source: case reviews)
- In one-third of the cases, alternative placement options were not being considered prior to changing the goal to LTFC. (source: case reviews)
- The State's own evaluation of its concurrent planning found that too many children are still placed in LTFC. This situation may be influenced by the maintenance payment for foster care. It is higher than either the relative assistance payment or the adoption assistance payment. (source: stakeholders)

Status of Permanency Outcome P2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 83.33% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Permanency Outcome P2.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	10	4	6	20	83.33
Partially Achieved:	2	2	0	4	16.67
Not Achieved or Addressed:	0	0	0	0	0
Not Applicable:	11	6	8	25	NA

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

23 (100.0%) Strength

0 (0%) Area Needing Improvement

26 Not Applicable

Basis:

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Counties were mostly successful in placing children in the county of residence. Out-of-county placements generally occurred when children had special treatment needs or when their relatives or siblings were living in other counties. If out-of-county placements occurred because of treatment needs, efforts were made to bring the children back to the community as soon as possible. (source: case reviews)
- Caseworkers in areas near Indian reservations were respectful of tribal traditions that encourage parents to have continuing relationships with their children even after the termination of parental rights. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Although recruitment efforts have intensified, there was still a shortage of foster homes in areas of high placement in one of the counties. This resulted in children usually being placed initially away from their schools and health care providers and away from their home community. (source: stakeholders)

Item 12. Placement with siblings

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

10 (76.92%) Strength

3 (23.08%) Area Needing Improvement

36 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- State law requires that siblings be placed together unless it is determined not to be in the best interest of a sibling, or unless it is not possible after appropriate efforts by the local social services agency. The State estimates that 65% to 70% of children free for adoption are members of sibling groups that need to be placed together. When parental rights are terminated and the children are committed to State guardianship, the MDHS Commissioner's consent is required if siblings are to be adopted by separate families. State adoption staff have developed guidelines for county staff to use in considering a recommendation to separate siblings.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Attempts were made to place siblings together. Separation of siblings was usually due to the needs of one or more of the children. (source: case reviews)
- When siblings were separated, counties made efforts to assure that the siblings maintained contact. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- In instances where siblings were separated, there were not always reassessments of whether they could be reunited. (source: case reviews)

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

15 (68.18%) Strength

7 (31.82%) Area Needing Improvement

27 Not Applicable

Basis:

Onsite Review:
Strength

- There were many examples of caseworkers making extraordinary efforts to facilitate visits with parents and siblings. (source: case reviews)
- Some foster parents encouraged natural parents to visit their children in the foster homes. Children feel comfortable and do not have the emotional setbacks that they sometimes experience after visiting their parents elsewhere. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- There were instances of visits granted for good behavior and denied for bad behavior. (source: case reviews)
- There were inconsistent efforts by caseworkers to facilitate visiting with parents and siblings. In some cases, extraordinary efforts were made (for example, a child to visit a parent in prison). However, in other cases there were minimal efforts to facilitate visits (for example, no efforts were made for a child to visit a parent who lived in the same community). (source: case reviews)
- It was suggested that Minnesota formalize a policy setting out a mandated structure for parent and sibling visitation. (source: stakeholders)

Item 14. Preserving connections

X Strength ____ Area Needing Improvement

22 (91.67%) Strength

2 (8.33%) Area Needing Improvement

25 Not Applicable

Basis:

Onsite Review:
Strength

- There were numerous examples of attempts to preserve the connections of American Indian children. (source: case reviews)
- Open adoptions were used to maintain family connections. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- Connections were more likely to be maintained when case plan participants advocated for preserving them. (source: case reviews)

Item 15. Relative placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

22 (95.65%) Strength

1 (4.35%) Area Needing Improvement

26 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- The Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program provides monthly financial assistance to relatives or people significant to children who accept permanent legal and physical custody of children. The introduction of the RCA program has reduced the numbers of children committed to State guardianship and enhanced the county and court's ability to ensure permanency for children. Created in 1997, the RCA caseload has risen rapidly. Two hundred children received assistance through the RCA program in 1998, 431 in 1999 and 874 in 2000.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Good efforts were made to locate both paternal and maternal relatives and assess their willingness and ability to serve as foster or adoptive families. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- The financial support made possible through the Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) program has allowed relatives who might not otherwise be able to take custody of children to do so. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- The lower level of financial support available under RCA reduces the number of relatives who might take advantage of the program rather than remaining as foster parents. (source: stakeholders)

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

15 (83.33%) Strength

3 (16.67%) Area Needing Improvement

31 Not Applicable

Basis:

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Birth parents maintaining contact with children placed with relative caregivers has had a positive impact on child/parent relationships. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Open adoption allows continuing relationships of children and natural parents.(source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- The willingness of foster parents to model effective parenting skills for birth parents has been very helpful. (source: stakeholders)
- The willingness of foster parents to let birth parents visit their children in the foster parents' homes has allowed for more natural interaction. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, efforts were made to help children maintain relationships with parents even in difficult situations such as when parents are in jail or transient. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- In a few cases, family reunification services were not being provided. (source: case reviews)

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 71.43% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Well-Being Outcome WB1.

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	13	9	13	35	71.43
Partially Achieved:	4	1	1	6	12.24
Not Achieved or Addressed:	6	2	0	8	16.33
Not Applicable:	0	0	0	0	NA

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

34 (69.39%) Strength
15 (30.61%) Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Although the percentage of children in placement by racial heritage has been consistent since 1994, African American and American Indian children continue to be over-represented in the foster care population. 22% of children in placement were African American although this group is only 4% of the child population. 11% were American Indian and they were 2% of the Minnesota child population.
- Based on a survey of county social service agency directors, services most often utilized include: general case management, family-based counseling, family-based life management skills, individual counseling, child welfare assessment, respite care, court related services and child foster care.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There were examples of caseworkers focusing on strengths and needs and making efforts to match services. (source: case reviews)
- In counties where the alternative response system is well established, services and resources were matched to families' needs. (source: case reviews)
- Generally, an exceptional array of services was available. There were individualized services and consideration of the identified service needs of children, parents, and foster parents. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Cases with unmet needs were almost always the result of a lack of proper assessment when the case was opened. (source: case reviews)
- Families of color who live away from high concentrations of other families of color were less likely to have access to culturally appropriate services within a reasonable commuting distance. (source: stakeholders)
- Services were made available due to the advocacy of foster parents and the efforts of ITO representatives rather than services being provided in accordance with an effective assessment and service-matching process. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In some cases, there were major needs for treatment that affected safety and permanency that were unmet by the agency (e.g., in one case, there was a significant need for therapy for sexual and emotional abuse). (source: case reviews)
- There was a chronic shortage of foster and adoptive homes for teenagers and children with extreme behavioral challenges. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

34 (69.39%) Strength

15 (30.61%) Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Information is unavailable regarding the involvement of parents in the development of the case plan. The state has gathered some data through the external review process related to the frequency with which parents have signed written placement plans. Parental signatures were found in 66.1% of 124 placement plans reviewed in 15 counties. The cases reviewed in the external reviews were not randomly selected or of sufficient numbers to allow for the determination of statistically significant results.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- In some cases there was evidence of involvement by families and children in case planning. (source: case reviews)
- When it was either an ICWA case with the ITO advocating for the family or a case where family group conferencing was used, the older children and the birth parents were more likely to be involved in case planning. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Even though parents signed the case plans, there were many instances in which the parents were not involved in their development. Since a Minnesota Supreme Court ruling requires a case plan to be submitted at the hold hearing that is held within 72 hours of the child's removal from the home, there is little opportunity for child and parental involvement in the initial case planning process. (source: stakeholders)
- Since one of the counties has a specialized staffing structure, families can be affected in the case planning process by the lack of clearly defined overall case management responsibilities. (source: case reviews)
- There was much inconsistency in this element from case to case and from county to county. (source: case reviews)

Item 19. Worker visits with child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

40 (81.63%) Strength

9 (18.37%) Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota did not have a systematic way to collect information about the frequency or nature of case contacts during the period under review. The introduction of the Social Service Information System (SSIS) in 1999 helped remedy the information collection problem. The social worker now enters the date of the contact, with whom the contact is made, the location and mode of the contact, and case notes regarding the contact. There is no rule or statute requiring monthly contact with a child in placement; however, it has been a Minnesota practice standard for many years. When MDHS conducts an external review of a county's child protection system, frequency of contact is one of the factors reviewers assess carefully. They examine case notes, interview workers and foster care providers, and look for contacts with collateral persons.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There was evidence of visits occurring in accordance with policy requirements and of workers being responsive and flexible in meeting with children to address their needs. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of workers making efforts to build relationships with children. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of frequent contact between caseworkers and children. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- There were no guidelines on the frequency of county worker visits for youth served by the juvenile justice system. In one county, such guidelines were in the process of being developed. Children in the foster care system and children who were previously in the foster care system who committed juvenile offenses typically ended up with both an agency worker and a probation officer. Although probation officers had primary responsibility, their focus was on assuring that other juvenile offenses were not committed. (source: stakeholders)
- There did not appear to be clear guidelines as to who was responsible for what activity when multiple staff such as local service providers, probation officers, county caseworkers and ITO social workers were involved. (source: stakeholders)

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

32 (82.05%) Strength

7 (17.95%) Area Needing Improvement

10 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Rules part 9560, requires that if a child remains at home while receiving child protective services, the worker must meet with the family at least monthly or contact them monthly to insure that a service provider has met with the family at least once during the month.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- In most cases, the parent was visited at least monthly. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- In almost one fifth of the cases rated under this item, improvement was needed since the worker either did not visit or the worker did not check with the family to determine if the service provider had visited. (source: case reviews)

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 81.58% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Well-Being Outcome WB2.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	11	8	12	31	81.58
Partially Achieved:	1	1	0	2	5.26
Not Achieved or Addressed:	4	0	1	5	13.16
Not Applicable:	7	3	1	11	NA

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

31 (81.58%) Strength

7 (18.42%) Area Needing Improvement

11 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Educational needs of children in placement are individually identified and addressed in the social service and out-of-home placement plan for the child. County workers are typically involved with the schools that children in placement attend. In Hennepin County there is a Child Services Worker assigned to a child in placement. That worker advocates for the child's needs in the school and usually participates in the development of an Individual Education Plan.
- Licensing rules that govern group and residential placement of children require the license holder to refer the child to the local school district for educational planning and placement.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Foster parents were excellent advocates for children having their educational needs met. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Developmental screenings for young children were taking place. (source: case reviews)
- Agency staff provided excellent advocacy for children with developmental delays. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, there was a well-developed multi-agency collaborative truancy prevention program in place. (source: stakeholders)
- Social workers in the school system kept track of children in foster care through membership on the county child protection team and were aware of investigations of abuse and neglect. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- There was too much reliance on foster parents to see to children's educational needs. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In one county, the agency did not focus on the children's educational needs or make them a priority. (source: stakeholders)
- There were multiple school changes related to placement changes. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- More attention is paid to the educational needs of children in foster care than to the needs of children in in-home cases. (source: stakeholders)
- The inclusion of school records in the case records was the exception. (source: case reviews)

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB3 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Per 45 CFR 1355.34(b)(3)(ii), 90% of the cases must be rated as "substantially achieved" during a State's initial review for the State to be in substantial conformity for this outcome. Of the cases reviewed, 67.39% were rated as "substantially achieved" for Well-Being Outcome WB3.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
	Team 1 Hennepin	Team 2 Beltrami	Team 3 Olmstead	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	13	7	11	31	67.39
Partially Achieved:	4	2	1	7	15.22
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	1	2	8	17.39
Not Applicable:	1	2	0	3	NA

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

32 (84.21%) Strength

6 (15.79%) Area Needing Improvement

11 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota statutes: If a child entering placement has not received a physical examination within the last twelve months, an agency must insure that the child receives an exam within 30 days of the time the child comes into care. SSIS, the statewide case planning system, requires the caseworker to document the date of the child's most recent medical check-up. All children in foster care who are eligible for Medicaid are required to receive Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) exams unless it is not in their best interests. SSIS requires caseworkers to document whether EPSDT was offered/provided. Minnesota rules require the local agency to inform the foster care provider about a child's immunizations and other pertinent health data. A group home parent is required to have a child examined once a year by a medical doctor and a dentist and to maintain a medical record for the child.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Health problems were identified and addressed.(source: case reviews)
- Timeframes for physical exams for entry into foster care were met. (source: case reviews)
- There was good use of in-home public health nurses. (source: case reviews)
- Developmental delays were addressed and medical needs tracked. (source: case reviews)
- In one county, the child protection team identified medical needs. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- There was too much reliance on foster parents to address health needs of children. Agency workers do not provide the necessary support for this responsibility. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- The medical section of the case plan was often left blank. (source: case reviews)
- It is very difficult to find adequate dental care for children in foster care because many providers do not participate in the Medicaid program. (source: stakeholders)
- If health was not an issue of risk when a child first came to the attention of the agency, an initial assessment may not have been conducted. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- ITO workers do not receive children's medical cards for several months. (source: stakeholders)

Item 23. Mental health of the child

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

28 (70.0%) Strength

12 (30.0%) Area Needing Improvement

9 Not Applicable

Basis:

SWA:

- The State has no provisions for mental health care for children in out-of-home placement separate from the provisions for general health services. Each county has some type of pre-placement screening and the question of what therapeutic services have been provided is routine. Also, counseling needs of families and children are typically addressed in both placement plans and in protective services plans.

Onsite Review:
Strength

- In some cases, the recommendations of mental health professionals were followed. (source: case reviews)
- One county changed service providers when positive outcomes for children were not being realized. (source: case reviews)
- There were examples of caseworkers making efforts to see that services were provided. (source: case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- If a mental health issue was not directly related to the presenting problem, typically it was not addressed. (source: case reviews)
- The lack of initial assessment has resulted in the mental health needs of children going unmet. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, there was a community shortage of mental health providers who could address children's problems. (source: stakeholders)
- Managed care and Health Maintenance Organization policies that restrict treatment for mental health have had a very negative impact. Children are not able to receive needed services. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Part B. Key Findings for Seven Systemic Factors

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:
SWA:

- Minnesota operates the Social Services Information System (SSIS), a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) which meets federal specifications for those systems and provides data for the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). Social Workers

use the system for intake, screening, time reporting, maltreatment investigation, out-of-home placement, and foster care licensing. All data and documentation relating to children and families served is stored in and produced by SSIS. Managers and Supervisors use SSIS for general caseload management and oversight, to monitor performance indicators and track cases. The system is also used for county-specific queries and reports. Before SSIS there was no statewide system, data was not uniform, and the State had no ability to get unduplicated numbers of reports about children on a statewide basis. Lack of programmer or systems expertise can cause a problem with the system when a county must tailor a unique report. It is expected that this problem will diminish, as staff becomes more adept in manipulating the system.

Onsite Review:
Strength

- The MDHS implemented a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) in 1999, that can produce the information required by regulation, namely, the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.
- A county with prior significant management information system capabilities reported that the SSIS represents a significant improvement over the former system. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- There are, however, characteristics of the SSIS that limit its effectiveness. There is a cumbersome and inflexible case plan design, a very limited ability to generate reports, and a lack of interfaces with court, law enforcement, service providers and mental health systems. (source: stakeholders)
- Although there will soon be the ability to track child abuse and neglect across counties, this capability is currently not in place. Counties do not know the maltreatment history of families moving from county to county. Data privacy is held in high regard in Minnesota. Traditionally there has been opposition to a central registry of maltreatment information. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Although significant enhancements are planned, the existing SSIS has a cumbersome report generation capability. (source: stakeholders)

V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota statutes require that the parent or parents, or other custodians, of the child, and the child's legal guardian sign the written placement plan. The law also requires that caseworkers involve parents in the development of the plan. Required elements of the placement plan include identification of strengths and needs, determination of goals, requests for specific services, and the evaluation of progress. Caseworkers are expected to include parents in all aspects of developing a case plan. The parents' right to legal counsel during the preparation of the placement plan is another means designed to involve parents in the process. Minnesota rules also require that the six-month administrative review be open to the parent or guardian, in addition to the child and foster care provider. This provides additional opportunities for the parent to be heard regarding the necessity of the placement and the evaluation of progress toward determined goals.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- All cases reviewed had written case plans. (source: case reviews)
- In one of the counties, there was significant parent involvement in case planning. Families and case managers work together to develop the case plan. Family group decision-making provides for family contribution into case planning. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- ICWA cases and cases that use family group conferencing are more likely to have child and parent involvement in the case planning process. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Many case plans were not updated-some for as long as two or three years. (source: case reviews)
- Although case plans existed, there was, in many instances, a question of the quality of the plans. They contained broad boilerplate language, were ambiguous, and lacked specificity and individualization for services. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Case plans typically did not address the immediate issue that led to a child's removal from the home. (source: case reviews)
- In many instances, birth parents were not involved in the development of the case plans. (source: case reviews)

- Since many items are contained in the case plans, it was difficult for families to determine what tasks were of the highest priority to accomplish before reunification could take place. (source: stakeholders)
- The case plan document is long and cumbersome. This may reduce the effectiveness of the planning process. (source: stakeholders)
- A significant number of case plans did not address the services to be provided to foster families. (source: case reviews)
- In one county, there was no case review system other than the supervisor meeting with caseworkers to discuss case progress. (source: stakeholders)

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota statutes require an administrative review for each child in foster care. The administrative review may be held by the court or outside the court as long as the requirements of an administrative review are met. In most instances, it is a court review or hearing. In addition, regular reviews are required for all children in placement under a court order. Until the court orders a permanency disposition, review in court is required every 90 days. If the permanency disposition is termination of parental rights, the requirement of a review every 90 days continues until an adoption or other permanency disposition is made final. If the permanency disposition is LTFC, a court hearing is required yearly and administrative reviews are required every six months.
- The MDHS and the Minnesota Supreme Court began the Children's Justice Initiative in 2000 in 12 counties. The Initiative will continue for five years and will ultimately include all counties. It will phase in a continuous assessment and improvement process for local jurisdictions to measure their practices against best practices in the handling of court cases involving children in foster care. The MDHS and the Court will work with local jurisdictions to establish judicially driven multidisciplinary teams to identify systems issues and barriers and make changes to improve the handling of cases. These teams will also assist in conducting assessments of county child protection system operations and provide technical assistance to local teams to implement best practices recommendations.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Court hearings and administrative reviews were held at required intervals. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

- Volunteer guardians ad litem (GAL) provided advocacy and oversight. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, there were ICWA-specific social services and county attorney units. This promoted better adherence to ICWA case planning and review requirements. (source: stakeholders)
- One county conducted a study of the causes of all hearing delays. (source: stakeholders)
- Since the State has a requirement for reviews every 90 days, the Federal requirement for a review every six months was met. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- GALs had difficulty meeting with children they represent if the children were placed out of the immediate community. (source: stakeholders)
- Since GALs do not receive salaries, GAL caseloads were very high in some counties due to the lack of a sufficient number of volunteers. (source: stakeholders)
- Probation officers were not always asked to attend hearings. (source: stakeholders)
- The responsibility for scheduling and tracking case plans and reviews by the county and the court were not defined. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- Since ITO caseworkers do not always receive adequate notice of hearings, issues related to ICWA may not receive proper representation in court. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, GALs were not always notified of changes in court dates due primarily to the limitations of the Total Court Information System (TCIS). (source: stakeholders)

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota statutes require that a permanency determination hearing be held not later than 12 months after a child enters court-ordered placement. For children under the age of eight at the time the petition is filed, the hearing must be held no later than six months after a child enters placement. Children in placement under a voluntary placement agreement or in placement under a delinquency petition must have a permanency hearing within 12 months of the Federal definition of the date the child is considered

to have entered foster care. Although there is no statutory requirement for a hearing for children in voluntary placement due solely to developmental disability, severe emotional handicap, or delinquency, it is required by MDHS. No statewide data regarding compliance with permanency time lines currently exists. Some data was obtained from external reviews, conducted from 1998 to the present in 17 counties and one tribal court jurisdiction. Of 83 cases reviewed for compliance with permanency, time lines were met in 37.4% of those cases. The 17 counties with data on the issue do not include Hennepin County, the largest metropolitan county.

- An internally produced report on child protection outcomes by the Hennepin County Children and Family Services Department provides some data on the county's rate of compliance with the permanency time lines in 1999. Of 69 children under the age of eight, 52% had a permanency hearing within six months. Of 50 children over the age of eight, 64% had a permanency hearing within 12 months.
- The State expects that the percentage of children experiencing timely permanency hearings will continue to improve due to efforts of MDHS and the State Supreme Court. In March 2000, the Minnesota Supreme Court promulgated new Rules of Juvenile Protection, which govern the court procedures for children in foster care due to abuse and neglect. The rules emphasize permanency requirements and set out time lines within which permanency decisions must be made. The rules were modeled on principles of the Permanency Resource Guidelines of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Under the Minnesota statutes, permanency hearings occur much more frequently than once every 12 months. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- In one of the counties reviewed, the large permanency hearing backlog that existed in 1996 has been eliminated. (source: stakeholders)
- Public defenders, county attorneys, and GALs were experienced and typically stayed with a child's case throughout. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, one judge was responsible for the case until the child returned home or the rights of the parents were terminated. (source: stakeholders)
- A criminal justice initiative attempts to reduce the number of court continuances. (source: stakeholders)
- One county provided volunteer drivers, day care, and worked to eliminate other barriers so that parties could participate in hearings and reviews. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- The various reviews that the MDHS has conducted identified that the State permanency hearing timeframes were not being met. They would, however, meet the longer Federal timeframes. (source: stakeholders)

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights (TPR) proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

X Strength ____ Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Consistent with Federal statute, Minnesota law requires that a county attorney file a TPR petition or a petition to support another permanent placement proceeding for all children who have been in out-of-home placement for 15 of the most recent 22 months. Minnesota statutes go beyond the Federal statute. A juvenile court is permitted to use a petition to TPR if it finds that reasonable efforts, under the direction of the court, have failed to correct the conditions leading to the child's placement. A presumption that reasonable efforts have failed is created upon a showing of: 1) A child has resided out of the parental home under court order for a cumulative period of 12 months within the preceding 22 months (six months if the child is under age eight.) The presumption for children under age eight does not arise at six months if the parent has maintained regular contact and is complying with the case plan. 2) A case plan has been approved by the court. 3) Conditions leading to the placement have not been corrected. This element is presumed to have been met upon a showing that the parent has not substantially complied with the court's orders and a reasonable case plan. 4) Reasonable efforts have been made by the local social services agency to rehabilitate the parent and reunify the family.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- The TPR procedures conform to Federal and State requirements. Courts are the driving forces in this process. (source: stakeholders)
- The TPR process is followed for children under age eight. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- In one county, the agency has to be pushed by the judge to file permanency petitions. (source: stakeholders)
- Some courts are reluctant to terminate parental rights for older children if there is no adoptive home available. (source: stakeholders)

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Statute 260C.152, subdivision 5 and court rules require notification of a hearing about a child to the child's foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers. They may also be heard in any review or hearing regarding the child. The decision on whether this will be in-person, by telephone, or in writing is made by the court. In most counties, the court administrator issues the notices. Training on this requirement has been provided since the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act to social workers, judges, and county attorneys.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Depending upon the type of review, either the court or the social services agency notifies all parties in the case. (source: stakeholders)
- Birth parents are informed of hearings. (source: stakeholders)
- The great majority of foster parents who were asked if they were notified of court hearings responded that they were. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- A foster parent remarked that it was "empowering" to know that she could be heard in court. (source: stakeholders)
- In some counties, staff are designated at the court and at the social services agency to notify involved parties of court hearings. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- In one county, some foster parents did not receive notices of pending hearings and thus did not have an opportunity to be heard. This was due primarily to the lack of effective automation at the court and the lack of an automated interface between the county and the court. Foster parents may move and the information may not be reported to all parties. Since about half of the children adopted are adopted by foster parents, it is important that the foster parents be heard. (source: stakeholders)

- ITO staff do not always receive adequate notice of hearings. This may reduce the effectiveness of their presentation of ICWA issues. (source: stakeholders)

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Statutes, section 245A.03 require that child placing and child residential programs be licensed and describes the process and requirements for such licensing.
- Minnesota Rules, parts 9543.0010 to 9543.0150 set forth delegated licensing functions and licensing requirements for county and private agencies.
- Minnesota Rule 9545 governs the licensing of child foster care, child placing agencies, residential treatment programs, and group homes. It addresses the qualifications of providers, training, cultural competence, and special requirements for each level of care.
- In 1995, Minnesota passed legislation enabling the creation of a single rule governing the licensing of placement facilities by both Corrections and DHS. The Legislature was concerned that MDHS served many of the same children but offered no continuity of assessment programming or service.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Counties adhered to licensing standards. In the rare event that an exception was made for an emergency placement, the exception did not compromise safety. (source: stakeholders)
- Tribal licensing standards did not allow for any exceptions. (source: stakeholders)

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- In 1998 Minnesota instituted an external review system to evaluate child protection practices in all 87 counties. The review was patterned after the proposed Federal Child and Family Services reviews. The reviews monitor compliance with applicable rules and statutes and examine county systems from a practice perspective. Reviewers use a checklist to verify compliance with state and federal law as well as child protection and out-of-home placement rules. In addition, reviewers interview caseworkers, supervisors, managers, law enforcement officials, mandated reporters, service providers, county attorneys, judges, public defenders, and GALs. Reviewers also observe multidisciplinary teams when possible and other agency or community meetings as appropriate. Based on observations and interviews, reviewers give county staff an external perspective on the characteristics and functioning of the agency. A report is written that contains recommendations that are based on mandatory requirements, best practice principles and reviewer experience.
- These reviews have been conducted in 37 counties so far. Although only four external reviewers are available and only two county follow-up visits have taken place so far, the counties have made changes as a result of the external reviews that have been conducted. One county redesigned its entire child protection system based on the review.
- Legislation in 1998 authorized Citizen Review Panels in three counties. The panels provide opportunities for members of the community to play an integral role in insuring that child protective service systems are protecting children from abuse and neglect and are meeting the permanency needs of children. Membership is representative of the communities in which they operate and include individuals with sensitivity to cultural, ethnic and economic diversity; expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect; and an understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. MDHS provides training, initial facilitation, and technical expertise in establishing the panels. Several other counties have expressed interest in establishing panels.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- The State's external review system, begun in 1998 and so far conducted in 37 counties, has had a positive effect on practice. Counties have made many changes based upon recommendations of the reviews.
- Two of the three counties reviewed participated in the State's external reviews and the CFSR results were consistent with State review findings in both counties. (source: stakeholders)
- Minnesota is proposing that reviewers conduct a follow-up visit to a county six months after the initial external review to assess the progress of the implementation of the review recommendations. (source: stakeholders)
- One county periodically sends out client satisfaction surveys. (source: stakeholders)
- One county will begin a six-month supervisory review of protective services cases. This was a result of the State's external review recommendation. (source: stakeholders)
- One county uses SSIS to track repeat maltreatment within 12 months of case closure; the number of alleged victims and reports; the child maltreatment rate per 1,000 confirmed reports; and the number of deaths or near deaths resulting from child abuse or neglect. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Although at present there is no consistent, mandatory, systematic county quality assurance review, during the week of the review, one county announced plans for a manager to lead a centralized quality assurance system. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a need for additional follow-up to the State external reviews. (source: stakeholders)

VII. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4X

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- The Minnesota Child Welfare Training System (MCWTS) was established through Minnesota Statutes, section 626.5591. It requires that the Commissioner of MDHS develop a competency-based program of foundational and advanced training for child protection workers. New workers must complete foundation training within their first six months of employment. Modules of the training are based on curricula developed by the Child Welfare League of America modified to include Minnesota-specific content.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- County staff uniformly praised the quality of the core training that is required for all new direct-service workers within six months of their employment. (source: stakeholders)
- The contract with the University of Minnesota to implement the training statewide through four regional training offices has promoted consistency. (source: stakeholders)
- The mobility assignments that allow county staff to work for MDHS and MDHS staff to work for counties were viewed very positively by county and State staff. (source: stakeholders)
- One county allowed service providers and ITO representatives to attend local training activities. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Training should be provided as soon as possible after staff are employed. (source: stakeholders)
- Some ITO social workers said that they do not have access to some training that was available to county workers. (source: stakeholders)

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- As stated in Item 32, MDHS is required by State statute to develop a competency-based advanced program of advanced training for child protection workers. MCWTS provides Specialized Skills Training and related skills training to county and tribal child welfare workers. Seventy eight percent of county and tribal child welfare staff attended at least one training session of MCWTS in 2000.

Onsite review:

Strength

- In a county-administered State such as Minnesota, counties have considerable autonomy. One way the State can encourage consistency is through training. The advanced curriculum, funded by the State and the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators, offers training on the newest practices, concepts, and trends in child welfare to experienced workers across the State. (source: stakeholders)
- One county participates in collaborative training with police and the county attorney on victim-sensitive interview techniques. (source: stakeholders)
- Training on cultural competence helps child welfare staff meet the multiple and diverse needs of families. It may influence the way counties respond initially to children of color, whether they provide placement prevention services, and how they plan for reunification. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Follow-up training is not always built into the training structure (source: stakeholders)
- Comprehensive ICWA training is not mandatory. An introductory ICWA session is part of the core training. (source: stakeholders)
- In some training sessions, trainers have asked American Indians to explain ICWA requirements. This is embarrassing and is a disincentive to tribal workers to attend the training. (source: stakeholders)

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Licensed foster families are required under Minnesota rule 9545.0510 to complete six hours of orientation prior to accepting a placement in their home and 12 hours of annual training to maintain a license. Annual training is not a requirement for families with a restricted license who care for specific children, families with a permanent placement, and families with over five years of experience. Families who provide emergency care, care for children who require special parenting skills, or provide group family foster care are required to have an additional six hours of annual training related to the special needs of the children.
- Minnesota statutes do not require training for adoptive families.

- Minnesota Statute 260C.215 requires licensed child-placing agencies to provide training.
- Private foster care agencies primarily license treatment family foster homes. Their programs require additional training hours beyond that which is required by statute. Many of the treatment foster care programs develop individual training plans for the foster families.
- From 1998 through June 30, 2000, 1,266 families attended training provided by five agencies funded by MDHS to prepare diverse families with 18 hours of training to care for foster and adoptive children with various special needs.
- From January 1998 through June 2000, 1,097 prospective adoptive families were provided training by one of the Public/Private Adoption Initiative contracting agencies. Topics included the impact on emotional and cognitive development of separation and loss, neglect and multiple placements. In addition, training was provided on cross-cultural awareness.
- MCWTS piloted training on preparing foster, adoptive, and kinship parents to care for children being placed in their homes. Each series consisted of 36 hours of training and 252 parents were trained. There has been overwhelming support and demand for this type of training and eleven more series are scheduled.
- MCWTS is now developing in-service training aimed at preserving families once placements are made.
- Group homes are licensed under Minnesota Rule 9545.1400. The licensing agency must offer orientation and preplacement training to group home licensees.
- MDHS licenses all shelter facilities and residential treatment facilities. Training is required quarterly on de-escalation techniques, physical and non-physical intervention policies, and emergency procedures. Annual training topics include individual needs of children and their families and psychotropic medications and their side effects.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Foster parents indicated that, although there are exceptions, the quality of training for foster parents is excellent. (source: stakeholders)
- There are monthly newsletters about available training through the National Foster Parent Association, the Minnesota Foster Parent Association and the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network. (source: stakeholders)
- Counties sponsor and facilitate foster care support groups. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, there is cooperative foster parent training with the county and ITOs. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Cross-cultural training for foster parents and adoptive parents that insures that children's cultural needs are met relative to customs, grooming, dietary needs, and religious practices is not always available. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- MDHS surveyed County Directors of Social Services using the list of 35 children's services from the State budget reporting system and 74% of the Directors responded. For each of the three child welfare goals, the survey measured the directors' perceptions of how frequently each service was used to achieve that particular goal. Directors also were asked which services they believed were most effective for reaching the goal. For reunification, the most frequently used services were General Case Management, Family-Based Counseling, and Family-Based Life Management Skills. Those three services were also listed as one of the most effective services for reunification by more than half of the directors.
- For pre-placement prevention, the most frequently used services were General Case Management, Family-Based Counseling, Family-Based Life Management Skills, Child Welfare Assessment, and Respite Care. General Case Management and Family-Based Counseling were also listed as among the three most effective services for pre-placement prevention by more than half of the directors. Family-Based Life Management Skills, Respite Care, and Family-Based Crisis Services were listed as among the three most effective services by more than 20 percent of county directors.
- For permanent living arrangements, the most frequently used services were General Case Management, Court-Related Services, Child Foster Care, Individual Counseling, and Family-Based Counseling. Adoption Services was

listed sixth. 72% of the directors listed General Case Management as one of the three most effective services to achieve permanent living arrangements for children while 43% listed Adoption Services.

- From February 1998 to June 2000, the Public/Private Adoption Initiative (PPAI) made 420 new adoptive placements and 141 foster parent adoptions. PPAI agencies facilitated the adoptions by conducting adoption studies that used the relevant elements of the foster care licensing study, providing training to the foster family and the child on the adoptive parent/child relationship, and providing finalization services.
- MDHS efforts to meet Title IV-B State Plan requirements for permanency resulted in the number of children under State Guardianship declining from 1,852 in 1997 to 1,524 in 2000. Adoptions of state wards increased from 418 in 1997 to 626 in 2000. In 1999, 637 children under State guardianship were adopted while 588 were newly committed. The number of children in need of adoptive homes declined from 1,246 in 1997 to 790 in 2000.
- Relative Custody Assistance (RCA) provides monthly financial assistance to relatives or people significant to children who accept permanent legal and physical custody of the children.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There are many services available in all counties. (source: case reviews and stakeholders)
- One county provides volunteer drivers to persons without transportation so that they can attend court hearings. (source: stakeholders)
- There are good respite and therapeutic services for developmentally delayed children. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- In one county, there is a children's mental health collaborative that addresses the mental health needs of children. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, a domestic violence response project responds to the needs of children residing with a parent who has been the victim of domestic violence. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- There is a shortage of chemical dependency treatment centers where children can live with parents who are receiving treatment. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- There are waiting lists of children for mental health and psychiatric services. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- There is a shortage of culturally appropriate services. (source: stakeholders)
- There is a great need for child care and respite care for foster parents, especially for those caring for children with behavioral problems. (source: stakeholders)

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.

X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- In the survey cited in Item 35, the Directors listed geographic location, that is, remoteness, as a barrier to respite care; lack of transportation as a barrier to court-related services, respite care, adoption services, and Relative Custody Assistance (RCA); and the hours of service as barriers to court-related services, adoption services, and RCA.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Co-location of social services staff and service providers helps make services more accessible. (source: stakeholders)
- One county works with a community center as part of a diversity initiative to serve Southeast Asian families. (source: stakeholders)
- One county has designated a staff member to work with the Somali community. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- In the past few years, there has been an expansion of services to children and families of color. This may be the result, in part, to the discussion of why minority children are disproportionately represented in the foster care population. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- There are waiting lists for in-home services in some counties. (source: stakeholders)
- It is difficult for counties to meet the service needs of non-English speaking families. (source: stakeholders)
- Services are often not provided unless schools or foster parents advocate on behalf of children. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- Culturally appropriate services are less available to Indian children living in other parts of Minnesota than they are to Indian children in the most populous Minnesota county. (source: stakeholders)

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- In the survey cited in Item 35, the results of the survey suggested that a lack of cultural appropriateness posed significant problems with access to services. At least half of the directors said that lack of cultural

appropriateness posed barriers to accessing family-based crisis services and child foster care.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Informational pamphlets and brochures have been translated into several languages and recorded on audiotape for non-English proficient families. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- Many services are targeted to African, African-American, Indian, Hispanic, and Asian populations. (source: stakeholders)
- Permanency planning for children in foster care considers the unique characteristics of American Indian children. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

Area Needing Improvement

- The greatest obstacle to the provision of individualized services is the failure to conduct comprehensive assessments when cases are opened. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- Because caseworker turnover is high and new workers may not be familiar with all services available, there is a need for a comprehensive (preferably automated) service directory. (source: stakeholders)

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3X	4

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- In developing the CFSP, MDHS began by convening a series of internal meetings to develop a framework and suggest possible new efforts. Goals and major new activities were shared with the public at meetings in St. Paul, St. Cloud, and Wilmar. A draft plan was shared with key constituency groups. The consultation process led to modification of the plan including work to address the needs of families involved with the TANF program or the

child welfare program or who were at-risk of entering these programs. MDHS also identified the need to move beyond a study of the disproportional representation of African American and American Indian children in the child welfare system. Several other advisory groups, though their work was not specifically related to the plan, contributed to its development.

- The Tribal Chairs of eleven Minnesota reservations and the Commissioner of MDHS signed the Tribal State agreement in 1998. The agreement provides a mechanism for maximizing the participation of tribes in decisions regarding Indian children. It also represents the development of a comprehensive working relationship between the tribes and MDHS for the delivery of child welfare services to Indian children and their families.

Onsite Review:
Strength

- In one county, collaborative teaming is evident within the social services structure and includes the Children's Mental Health Collaborative, Family Service Collaborative, Domestic Violence Intervention Team, and the Alternative Response partnership that target for early intervention families with at-risk children. (source: stakeholders)
- In the same county, the Community Social Service Advisory Board holds open meetings twice a year for the community to speak and give suggestions on how social services should be provided. Divergent views are encouraged and respected. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, Child Protection Screeners were located in three police precincts, including the precinct with the highest number of child protection removals. This staffing approach, instituted four years ago, was in response to the concerns of minority communities that children were being removed inappropriately from their homes. (source: stakeholders)
- There are active efforts and specific units to address ICWA issues. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, an African-American men's study group has been formed to develop strategies for effectively working with fathers. (source: stakeholders)
- In one county, a tribal social worker attends the regular Child Protective Team meetings. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Lack of affordable housing, the effects of poverty, cultural differences, greater public agency contact with families of color, and a chemical dependency crisis have led to children of color being placed in the system in numbers greater than their portion of the population. One county has the second largest urban American Indian population in the country. Although African-American children constitute the greatest number of children in foster care in the same county, the greater disproportionate percentage is for American Indian children. The discussion of the disproportionate representation of minority children in the child welfare system has led to many positive changes. However, some stakeholders express concerns regarding the level of racial diversity of staff involved in the child welfare system as compared to the level of racial diversity of families and children receiving services. (source: stakeholders)

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

Onsite Review:

Strength

- The CFSP is prepared annually after consultation with various community representatives. (source: stakeholders)

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Most Minnesota counties have a family service collaborative or a children's mental health collaborative whose purpose is to promote a seamless system of services to children. The collaboratives include representatives of the social services agency, public health agency, local school district and other agencies.
- Most collaboratives participate in the Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS). The LCTS measures time spent on case management, administrative, and other activities performed by staff of public health agencies, corrections agencies, and school districts that work with children at-risk of placement or in need of medical services. Funds claimed through LCTS must be spent on expansion of early intervention and prevention services for these children.

- Multidisciplinary child protection teams offer another means of coordinating services. Minnesota statutes require each county to establish such a team. They generally include representatives of child protection agencies, county attorney offices, law enforcement agencies, schools, medical and mental health agencies, and parent groups.
- Counties or groups of counties may establish child abuse prevention councils. There are currently 85, each of which must have at least nine members. The majority of members must represent the community at large, not service-providing agencies or public agencies. Councils that meet the membership requirements and have submitted a plan for child abuse prevention, can review requests for funds from the Children's Trust Fund and make funding recommendations to the Children's Trust Fund Advisory Council.
- Counties may use human services boards to plan for the coordinated delivery of human services to the county. The board may manage human service resources, plan for the delivery of services, and perform other related duties. Board advisory committees must include persons receiving services and providers of services.
- MDHS staff participate in a number of workgroups and cross-agency committees to promote coordination of efforts at the State level. Staff in the Family and Children's Services Division work with staff from other public and private agencies on groups examining policies related to juvenile delinquency, chemical dependency, domestic violence, and other issues. These cross-agency collaborations have enhanced the ability to ensure that the services MDHS oversees are coordinated with other services provided to children and families.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Generally service providers and county caseworkers are well versed in the eligibility requirements of programs including TANF (Minnesota Family Investment Program, MFIP), Medicaid, Food Stamps, and Social Security. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)

**X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING,
RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION**

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4X

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Rule 9545 establishes the legal standards for foster homes, adoptive homes, and childcare institutions.
- Both statute and rule require periodic re-licensing studies. Not all negative licensing actions result from harm or risk of harm to children, but they all in some way relate to the standards of care provided to children as described in the rule. In 1999 and 2000, there were negative foster home licensing actions such as licenses being suspended, conditionally suspended, immediately suspended, revoked, conditional only licenses being granted, and license applications being denied; conditional licenses were used in three situations with group homes; and no negative licensing actions were taken for residential treatment institutions.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Licensing standards have been implemented. (source: stakeholders and case reviews)
- One county implements the statewide standards through a Family Foster Home (FFH) and an agency licensing and recruitment program. (source: stakeholders)
- There is extensive training available for foster and adoptive parents. This includes training on child-specific issues. (source: stakeholders)
- A foster parent complaint process is set out in the foster parent manual. (source: stakeholders)

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV- E or IV-B funds.

X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Statute 2257 requires that all pre-adoptive or foster care placements be made by the Commissioner, a licensed child placing or adoptive agency, or under the direct adoption provisions of Minnesota Statute 247. A pre-adoptive placement in a home with an approved adoption study completed by a licensed adoption agency is equivalent to a placement in a licensed foster home. If the adoption does not occur within two years of placement, the home must be licensed as a foster home. If there is no approved adoption study, the family cannot be considered as an adoptive resource until one is completed.
- Foster family homes are licensed by county or private agencies under Minnesota Rule 9543. MDHS reviews counties every four years to certify the counties to license family day care, adult foster care, and child foster care. It also reviews private agencies to certify them to license child foster care. Departmental reviews for adherence to the rule insure that program rules are uniformly enforced.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- Standards are applied uniformly to relative and non-relative homes. (source: stakeholders)
- Licensing workers conduct monitoring visits four times a year. These visits can be unannounced. (source: stakeholders)
- Although there are exemptions to the licensing standards, these exemptions are limited to 90 days duration and do not compromise safety. A foster care placement in a home exempted from licensing requirements is not eligible for IV-E reimbursement. (source: stakeholders)

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Statutes require criminal background checks on each prospective adoptive parent and other adults living in the home. In addition, a check of juvenile court records is made on all persons living in the home under the age of twenty-five. There must also be a check, for the past ten years, for any substantiated child or vulnerable adult maltreatment and domestic violence

data with local law enforcement, social services agencies, and district courts. There also must be a check of records maintained by the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. The results of criminal background checks must be incorporated into the adoption study.

- MDHS reviews all Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) requests for compliance with Minnesota's standards for adoption studies and foster care requirements. MDHS also reviews adoption studies related to requests for the Commissioner's consent for children to be adopted from another country or for the Commissioner's letter accepting a home study in an international adoption.
- The Licensing Act, Minnesota Statutes, section 245A, requires criminal record background checks of all employees of licensed adoption agencies. Any person hired as a social worker by a private licensed adoption or foster care agency must be licensed (Minnesota Statutes, section 148B.28.)
- MDHS conducts background studies on persons working in an MDHS-licensed program. The background study consists of a review of criminal history records and substantiated maltreatment records. Persons are disqualified for specific crimes or for substantiated maltreatment that is serious or recurring.

Onsite Review:
Strength

- The State complies with all Federal requirements for criminal background clearances. (source: stakeholders)

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

X Strength ____ Area Needing Improvement

Basis:
SWA:

- Local county social service agencies have the primary responsibility to recruit family foster homes. Each, in accordance with Minnesota Rule, part 9560.670, must have a plan for the diligent recruitment of foster care providers who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster homes are needed. The agencies must do outreach for recruitment and keep records of actions to comply with the plan. MDHS visits each county every four years to monitor compliance. Recruitment strategies have included articles in newspapers, television and public service announcements, brochures and fliers distributed throughout the community, and gift incentives to foster parents who recruit new families.
- Many private licensed agencies in Minnesota recruit and train foster and adoptive families.

- MDHS has worked to coordinate mass media promotion, support local recruitment efforts, sponsor public and private initiatives, and develop supports for the retention of foster and adoptive parents. Adoptions have increased from 418 finalized adoptions in 1997 to 626 in 2000.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- There are many recruitment efforts including advertisements in newspapers, public service announcements, brochures distributed to churches, and finder's fees for foster parents who recruit new parents. (source: stakeholders)
- Several counties have been successful in meeting their targets for the recruitment of foster families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care for those counties. (source: stakeholders)
- One county worked closely with the Region V Office of Civil Rights when it developed a foster and adoptive family matching tool. (source: stakeholders)
- Counties track outcomes in this area. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- The population of some counties is not sufficiently diverse to have a pool of racially and ethnically diverse foster homes. (source: stakeholders)
- Some counties do not act quickly to license persons as soon as they express an interest in being foster parents. (source: stakeholders)
- Foster parent support groups have the beneficial side effect of encouraging the recruitment of additional foster parents by current foster parents. (source: stakeholders)

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis:

SWA:

- Minnesota Statutes require all children to be registered on the State Adoption Exchange (SAE) within 45 days of commitment to the Commissioner's guardianship. Minnesota contracts with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) to manage the SAE. The SAE consists of a Waiting Children's book that is printed twice monthly and sent to public and private social service agencies, libraries, and private subscribers throughout and outside the State. MARN maintains an internet Waiting Children Website that is hyperlinked to those maintained by Hennepin and Ramsey Counties.
- Minnesota has a task force on permanence that meets monthly to present children in need of adoptive homes and interested families to discuss issues related to adoption.

- Downey Side, an agency of Minnesota's PPAI, has placed Minnesota children with families recruited from other states.
- From 1998 through 2000 194 children were placed with families outside Minnesota through the ICPC. 175 were placed from other states into Minnesota.
- Families in rural Minnesota have had difficulty achieving adoptive placements, largely due to concerns about resources. The PPAI has had a positive impact on increasing those numbers.

Onsite Review:

Strength

- If a long wait is anticipated in a receiving ICPC State, some counties pay a private agency in that State to conduct the home study so that the process can be expedited. (source: stakeholders)
- One county uses the MARN and places waiting children on the Internet, uses a "Waiting Children" book and uses a Microsoft Access data base to track adoptions. (source: stakeholders)

Area Needing Improvement

- Lengthy response times from States including Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana have contributed to delays in permanent placement. (source: stakeholders)

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Safety

 N Outcome S1
 ✓ Item 1
 _____ Item 2
 N Outcome S2
 ✓ Item 3
 ✓ Item 4

Permanency

 N Outcome P1
 ✓ Item 5
 ✓ Item 6
 ✓ Item 7
 _____ Item 8
 ✓ Item 9
 ✓ Item 10
 N Outcome P2
 _____ Item 11
 ✓ Item 12
 ✓ Item 13
 _____ Item 14
 _____ Item 15
 _____ Item 16

Child and Family well-being

 N Outcome WB1
 ✓ Item 17
 ✓ Item 18
 ✓ Item 19
 ✓ Item 20
 N Outcome WB2
 ✓ Item 21

 N Outcome WB3
 ✓ Item 22
 ✓ Item 23

Systemic Factors

 Y Statewide Information System
 _____ Item 24
 Y Case Review System
 _____ Item 25
 _____ Item 26
 _____ Item 27
 _____ Item 28
 _____ Item 29

Y Quality Assurance System

_____ Item 30
_____ Item 31
 Y Training
 _____ Item 32
 _____ Item 33
 _____ Item 34
 Y Service Array
 _____ Item 35
 _____ Item 36
 _____ Item 37
 Y Agency Responsiveness to the
 Community
 _____ Item 38
 _____ Item 39
 _____ Item 40
 Y Foster and Adoptive Parent
 Licensing, Recruitment, and
 Retention
 _____ Item 41
 _____ Item 42
 _____ Item 43
 _____ Item 44
 _____ Item 45